

**WELCOME ADDRESS TO THE 26th INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON
REDUCED ENRICHMENT FOR RESEARCH AND TEST REACTORS**

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Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, I am Yuri Sokolov, Deputy Director General for Nuclear Energy. On behalf of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, I am pleased to open this 26th International Meeting on Reduced Enrichment for Research and Test Reactors.

It is an honour for me to welcome you this morning. While the IAEA has been a vigorous supporter of the RERTR programme since its inception, this is the first time that the annual meeting has been held here at IAEA Headquarters. We hope you enjoy your visit to the IAEA and to Vienna, and please feel free to ask our staff for any assistance or information that you may require.

I would like to thank all the attendees for being able to participate in the meeting this week. Many of you have travelled a long way to be here, and are taking valuable time from your busy schedules. We look forward to a highly successful meeting, with approximately 170 participants from 36 countries and two organizations. The programme promises to be quite interesting, with diverse presentations encompassing policy, technical, and programmatic matters as well as two interesting field trips planned at the end of the week.

This year's meeting comes at an opportune moment, with both challenges and opportunities facing the RERTR programme, member states, the IAEA, and research reactor operators. Consequently, it is important to not only look back upon the successes of the RERTR programme since the last conference, but more importantly to look forward to see how we can work together to achieve RERTR's objectives of minimizing and eventually eliminating the civil use of HEU.

RERTR and the related fresh and spent fuel return efforts have gained new momentum with the launching of the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) by U.S. Energy Secretary Abraham here in Vienna on May 25, 2004. All of the activities we will be discussing this week are included within the framework of the GTRI. As many of you know, the international programmes to qualify high density, LEU, dispersion fuels based on U-Mo alloys have run into unexpected technical difficulties that will delay qualification. A number of the presentations this week will address the problems that have been encountered. Hopefully, we will also hear about technical approaches to overcome the difficulties, as well as other promising approaches.

At the same time, it is encouraging that the international resolve to reduce and eventually eliminate HEU in international commerce appears to have strengthened. In the past year, fresh HEU at research reactors in different countries have been returned to the country of original enrichment. In all these examples, the return of the fresh fuel was accompanied by plans for conversion of existing reactors or design of new reactors to use LEU, as well as for the repatriation of spent research reactor fuel.

The IAEA, particularly the Department of Technical Cooperation and my Department of Nuclear Energy have played an important role in implementing these fresh fuel return activities. In addition, several of the reactor conversion projects will be carried out under the auspices of IAEA technical cooperation projects and with important involvement of the Department of Nuclear Energy.

The IAEA has also supported the “third leg” of the RERTR triangle, the repatriation of spent fuel to the country of original enrichment. The U.S. spent fuel acceptance programme has been operating for more than eight years, and was originally scheduled to terminate in 2006. We are expecting to hear important announcements concerning the extension of the U.S. programme during this conference and we know that many of you are eager to hear good news in this regard.

At the same time, the IAEA has been working hard with the U.S. and Russia to initiate the Russian research reactor spent fuel return programme. We are eager to see the first successful shipment in this programme, continue to assist it every way we can, and look forward to presentations this week on both the Russian RERTR and spent fuel return efforts.

In closing, I would first like to thank the U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, and the RERTR Programme at Argonne National Laboratory for being the main sponsors of the conference, and for their support and assistance in organizing this meeting. I would like to thank them as for their confidence in the IAEA, as they requested us to host the conference on rather short notice. I would also like to thank the Department of Energy for its financial support of fresh fuel return shipments carried out in cooperation with the IAEA as well as for its support to reactor conversions worldwide.

We would also like to express appreciation to the corporate and institutional sponsors of this conference: the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organization, Edlow International, MDS Nordion, Nuclear Assurance Corporation, Nuclear Cargo and Service, NUKEM, and Transport Logistics International. Their generous contributions have enabled us to hold the kind of conference that RERTR participants have come to expect.

I would also like to thank the two hosts of our field trips on Friday: the Atominstitut of the Technical University of Vienna, particularly Dr. Helmut Bock. Dr. Bock and his staff at the Institute’s research reactor are important collaborators with many programmes at the IAEA. Also Dr. Sandor Toszer at KFKI in Budapest, as well

I would like to add a word regarding one of our IAEA staff members whom many of you know very well. Iain Ritchie will be retiring from the IAEA next spring, making this his last RERTR meeting representing the Agency. Iain has been a “pillar” of the research reactor community, and his knowledge, experience, and energy will be sorely missed. Please join with me in recognizing Iain’s many achievements to research reactors, RERTR, and spent fuel return efforts.

Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to thank all the members of the Organizing Committee for their hard working in preparing this meeting, which I am certain will be a great success. I look forward to a week of exciting interchange of ideas and experience. I wish you all a fruitful meeting and an enjoyable stay in this beautiful city of Vienna.